

PEARL of the ARMY

Guy W. McConnell

FIFTEENTH EPISODE

The Colonel's Orderly.

It was all over.

The Silent Menace was unmasked. On the roof of the army administration building, huddled, his eyes closed, his face partly concealed in the crook of his unbroken arm, he lay in the center of an awed group, dying.

In this group was Major Thornton Brent and his wife, Mrs. Thornton Brent, formerly Miss Bertha Bonn. Even in that tragic moment a gold locket was conspicuous at her throat. At last had Bertha come into her own and the inscription on the miniature in the locket become a fact, indeed, Colonel Richard H. Dare and the chief of the army staff were also in the group, spellbound before the revelation they beheld.

Kneeling beside the dying man, from whom consciousness had not entirely fled, was Miss Pearl Dare and her father's orderly and her lover, T. O. Adams, about whom the shrouds of mystery had not altogether been removed.

The flag which the Silent Menace had attempted to despoil again fluttered in its place on the army administration building pole.

The dying man opened his eyes and gazed upon it in intense hatred. "It will yet come down!" he growled, as if foretelling the future.

A gust of wind shook the flag and unfurled its stars and stripes before the gaze of the stricken man, as if to defy and challenge him and the whole world.

The dying man turned from the hateful object of his sight and breathed his last. "The Silent Menace has not perished!" were his departing words. "America, look out!"

A shudder of horror ran through the spectators. Pearl Dare and T. O. Adams gave the dead man's face one indescribable look, rose and walked away, hand in hand, thinking of many things, of everything.

The dead man was Toko. Toko, the dare chauffeur, the faithful servant, the never suspected or questioned.

Toko was the Silent Menace. Toko was the leader of the Foreign Alliance, the master political criminal, the man of distinguished characteristics of bearing, speech, physical prowess and illimitable power; a ruler, an international dreamer, superclever and supercunning, a genius in shaping events, in intrigue, an archplotter for crowns and sceptres against democracy and personal freedom.

Toko, the quiet and unassuming chauffeur, was all this, the man who shook America and foiled it to the last with a thick black muffler. That he died a madman there was not the slightest doubt; for no sane person, no matter how revengeful or desperate, would have hazarded discovery when he must have known that every secret service man in Washington was searching for him. Furthermore, his language and appearance in death indicated that the man had gone entirely out of his head.

And now a curious change was apparent in the deportment of T. O. Adams. Before leaving the roof with Pearl he approached Brent and Bertha, briefly congratulated them and, not as a subordinate addressing his superior but as an equal, he requested the major to bring his wife to the Dares as soon as possible; and he also asked the colonel if he would try and arrange to be at home at an early hour.

Both the colonel and Brent took it that he had something further to tell about the Silent Menace and agreed to his wishes. Bertha did not know what to think. A preposterous notion had come into her mind, but it was so preposterous that it was dismissed at once, leaving her blank.

Adams and Pearl went to the hospital in which Toko had been placed on the day of the night they became prisoners on the ship of the Silent Menace en route to the canal. Here, to their amazement, although they now clearly understood, they learned that on the same night Toko had been taken from the hospital on a written order purporting to come from Colonel Dare, nothing strange being thought of that. This cleared the last but one of the only two missing links in the mystery of Toko, the other being seemingly impossible of solution.

It was this: How did Toko learn that the Canal Defense plans were concealed under the left shoulder strap and the chemical wafers in the watch-fob locket of Captain Ralph Payne on that day in July when the latter left the secret council chamber of the general army staff, the only person outside of those in the session to whom this secret was known? And was the Grandian ambassador murdered by Toko?

"Someone must have told Toko!" declared Pearl, perplexed, as they hurried homeward. "Yet not a soul had left the council chamber when Captain

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Payne reached his hotel and found Toko's warning.

"Then you now think that Captain Payne was entirely innocent?" queried Adams, curiously.

"I am positive, as you are!" burst from the girl.

"There is no telephone connection from that council chamber, is there?"

"No connection of any kind with the outside world."

"And no one in the chamber knew what was to be done with the plans and the wafers when the meeting was called?"

"Not until they assembled did anyone except the chief of the army staff know, not even that there were such plans and wafers."

Adams laughed lightly. "Then there is only one answer to this puzzle!" he exclaimed. "Payne must have been guilty of forging his own handwriting on that note of warning and of telling Toko—or the Grandian ambassador—that the priceless secret was in his person—and where. That's all there is to that, Pearl!"

She looked at him questioning. "You do not believe that! Do you?"

He laughed again. "What else is there to believe?"

She fell silent, sighing, and he said nothing more on the subject just then.

As soon as they reached the Dare residence, and before they entered the house, Adams very gravely requested Pearl to go with him to Toko's quarters over the garage. She eagerly consented.

When they entered the chauffeur's room it was apparent that Toko had been there recently. The floor was littered with torn-up pieces of letters and envelopes, on which the addresses, signatures and dates, as well as the postmarks, were rendered undecipherable. There was not a stitch of clothing or a single personal effect of the chauffeur in the place, not even a trunk or valise.

"He cleaned everything out, didn't he? Bag and baggage!" commented Adams, disappointment written on his face. "We shall probably never know who Toko was."

"What's this?" questioned Pearl, paying little heed to his remarks, absorbed in a discovery she had made. Tucked on the back of the door was a plain, bulky envelope, sealed.

"T. O. ADAMS," the address read.

"That's what I've been rather expecting to find, Pearl!" Adams cried, with an enthusiasm at which she wondered greatly. "May I have it, please?"

A curious depression came upon Pearl as she looked from the name on the envelope to the owner, whose face was wreathed in smiles of real joy. She handed it to him without removing her eyes from his. Then an unfinished conversation at the army administration building flashed into her mind.

"Do you recall the unanswered questions I asked you, Adams, several hours ago?" she inquired, quickly and seriously, coming quite close to him.

"Yes, Pearl," he replied in low, tense tones.

"Will you now answer them, please?" she continued, in a pleading way; "so that all may be clear between us—so that there may be no hidden mystery to crop out in the years to come—and spoil our happiness and content and mutual trust. Is your name really T. O. Adams? Do you come from Monk's Corner, Nebraska, or wherever that outlandish place may be? Did you know that Toko was the Silent Menace? You were not in any way in league with him, were you?"

"Must you have your answer to all these questions now?" he inquired in a strange, thick voice.

"As you wish," she rejoined, not without a tinge of impatience.

"I am not T. O. Adams of Monk's Corner, Nebraska," he finally admitted in hollow tones.

The statement did not seem to surprise her. She made no comment, looking down at the tip of her slipper, waiting.

"I am not the mysterious inventor of the Canal Defense plans or the chemical wafers," he continued in the same tones.

She looked up at that, her face showing pain and surprise.

"I never said that I was!" he continued, quickly, interpreting her thought. "I said that T. O. Adams was, and he was. And he was from Monk's Corner, Nebraska."

She seemed to be puzzled at this explanation, which was not an explanation at all, so far as she could see.

"I did not know that Toko was the Silent Menace, although I suspected it, and I, of course, was not in league with him in any way. Now, are my answers satisfactory?"

"No!" she exclaimed, candidly, stepping back a pace. Her voice was cool.

"Who, may I ask, is the man to whom I have given my love and pledged my life? What has become of T. O. Adams, whose name and character you have assumed—I must admit, so well?"

"Adams is dead, Pearl," this strange person stated in accents so harsh with emotion that she became startled and only by sheer power of will restrained

an impulse to fly from a haunting, undefined terror and—him.

"He died in my arms," the enigma went on, speaking in a disjointed way. "He breathed his secret to me, not knowing mine!" He paused heavily, repeating after awhile: "Not knowing mine!"

"Where did Adams' death occur?" she demanded in a shrill voice which shocked the ears of her listener.

"He was killed in the railroad wreck. He was on the same train and in the same coach with Captain Ralph Payne. As was I," the impostor informed her in a mutter.

"You were with Captain Payne?" He nodded solemnly. "I was."

"You knew him well? You were his friend?"

"I knew him well and tried to be his friend."

"You were sure of his innocence—absolutely sure? It was Payne you set out to clear, not—Adams?"

"Yes; for Adams was engaged, on his own account, on the same mission. He left papers to that effect in his hand grip. I have those papers," he stated, a trifle more composed.

"Do those papers explain the disappearance of Adams on the afternoon the defense plans and wafers were stolen from Payne?"

Pearl was quite herself again. It was evident that she meant to force from this man every shred of information he possessed. It was also plain that he was loath, for some reason, to come out with the whole truth.

"They do," he presently admitted. "Adams was not stricken with paralysis as the army surgeons believed. He was drugged by the Silent Menace. He recovered consciousness, and—must I go on, Pearl?" he cried with sudden distress.

"Must you go on?" she repeated, with rage. She whipped out a pocket pistol. "If you do not do so, and if you falter with the truth, I give you fair warning I shall not hesitate to use this. Go on!"

"Well, he killed the nurse set by the Silent Menace to watch him—"

"Toko?"

"Toko; yes. He hid her body in his trunk, carried the trunk down the back stairs of the cheap hotel in which he was stopping, found a wheelbarrow, took it to the railroad depot and was about to depart for Monk's Corner, there to bury the body secretly and return, when news of the Payne case and the murder of the Grandian ambassador filtered through the press. Following this, he waited and took the same train with Payne, intending to see and talk with him. Then came the wreck in which he received mortal injuries. As I have said before, he fell in my arms dying, just able to tell me



Toko Was the Silent Menace.

enough to interest me and direct me how to learn all. I buried the dead nurse, trunk and all," he tersely concluded this astounding revelation. "I can take you to the very spot and prove this statement which, heaven alone knows, I didn't want to make, for it incriminates a well-meaning fellow, though he is dead."

Pearl shuddered and smoothed her fevered brow. "Oh, Adams!" she wailed, unconsciously using that name in utter distress.

He flew to her side to support her, for she was tottering. Whether conscious of her action or not, she placed an arm around his neck and leaned against his shoulder wearily.

"Pearl!" he breathed softly, stirred to the depths of his being. "Pearl, my love!"

She broke into tears. "Who are you?" she sobbed, clinging in a helpless fashion to his sleeve. "Who are you?"

He freed himself gently and placed Toko's sealed letter in her trembling hands. "I will leave you alone to read whatever this letter may contain," he said with a bright smile. "Even though I was not positive about Toko, he was from the very first informer of my true character and identity. See whether this does not so turn out. May I use one of your automobiles?"

She looked at the envelope. Then she looked at him. "You will return?" she hesitated.

"I give you my solemn word to return very soon," he assured her.

All of a sudden Pearl felt at ease concerning this nameless and mysterious lover of hers and desired to be alone to read Toko's letter.

"I shall be waiting for you," she murmured, all of her tenderness reviving, raising her lips for the kiss he so plainly desired to give and receive in return.

A few minutes later he drove out of the garage in her new runabout and raced toward.

He stopped the machine in front of the home of a prominent trust company official and attorney, asking the man who answered the doorbell for Mr. Bainbridge.

He was immediately ushered into a private library office. Here, alone, sat a thin, gray-haired, keen-eyed attorney, who rose and bowed, ransacking his brain to recall where he had seen this visitor before, if ever.

"You are Mr. Bainbridge, the senior?" questioned the visitor, taking the proffered chair on the other side of the lawyer's desk.

Mr. Bainbridge inclined his head politely. "I did not get your name?"

"No," grimly. Then: "You do not recognize my face?"

"I do and I don't," confessed the embarrassed attorney.

His visitor suddenly picked up pencil and paper and scribbled a name. This he shoved under the lawyer's eyes.

"What!" ejaculated Mr. Bainbridge, leaping out of his chair, his eyes popping, his face white and drawn. "Impossible, sir! That man is dead and buried!"

His visitor laughed heartily. "He is very much alive, Bainbridge," he chuckled. "For I am he. Come with me. I will prove it."

But Mr. Bainbridge drew back in alarm, and looked as though he intended to call for help to put an insane person out of his house.

"You don't believe me?" queried his caller, rising.

"I can't!" groaned the confused attorney. "Yet I must confess there are certain resemblances, but only in your speech and about the eyes. I fear that you must bring me conclusive proof, for this is no trifling matter."

"Suppose, Bainbridge, you call Miss Pearl Dare on the telephone and inquire about me," the caller suggested, now a trifle impatient. "I want to ask several important questions which you doubtless won't answer unless you are convinced of my claim."

"A good idea!" exclaimed Mr. Bainbridge, and he hastened from the room to do the talking elsewhere.

When he returned he grasped his visitor by the hand in a tight grip. He was visibly affected and deeply apologetic. "God be thanked for this mo-

tion, and also solution. On this premise I fooled even my sweetheart. Nerve, Bainbridge, nerve—that's it, and your wits about you every minute."

"But, my boy! Why have you kept this secret so closely guarded? Why did you not come to me?" cried his attorney and long-time friend.

"I took no chances against defeat," was the illuminating explanation. "Remember, Bainbridge, the charge against me had to be proven false. This could be done only by exposing the true criminal and obtaining his confession of guilt. I—"

"Have you got that?" interjected Mr. Bainbridge, eagerly.

"Miss Dare has it. At least I think she has it!" replied his visitor, suddenly troubled. He picked up his hat. "Come! We will go to Miss Dare!" And he hurried out of the room, followed by the excited trust officer.

On the ride to the Dares, the man beside Mr. Bainbridge asked the questions originally in his mind.

"My estate—has it ever been distributed?"

"No. Your legatee refused to touch the money. Through an order of court I have held your entire fortune in trust. Every penny can be accounted for—and more," replied the attorney, smiling mysteriously.

"What do you mean by those last words?"

"I transferred your real estate holdings to stocks and bonds of a very high grade. They have increased astonishingly in value, at least by one hundred thousand, if not more."

"How's that?" was the sharp question. "Stocks and bonds of what nature?"

"War bonds!"

The man at the wheel turned to his attorney quickly. "Sell out, Mr. Bainbridge, at once!" he exclaimed, with a show of irritation. "I couldn't touch that money. As to the surplus—" he paused, smiling peculiarly, "suppose you make a draft, payable to bearer, for one hundred thousand. I have immediate use for that exact amount!"

The lawyer looked at him in astonishment, shaking his head sadly. The man surely had changed. "That's a very large sum," he ventured.

"Oh, yes," smiled the other, blandly. "It will make a substantial wedding gift to two needy unfortunates who have just been married."

"Wedding gift?" mumbled Mr. Bainbridge, under his breath; and there the conversation ended, for they had reached the Dares.

Mr. Bainbridge was dropped off at the house and his companion proceeded with the car, as usual, to the garage. He seemed to take a longer time than necessary in putting the car away. Indeed, now that the end and a new beginning of things was about to come to pass, he showed a reluctance to hasten the change.

He sat down on the running board of the big limousine, resting his chin in an upturned palm, and fell into a brown study.

Meanwhile, in the Dare library Lawyer Bainbridge and the colonel were shaking hands with more vigor than either had shown for many a day. The house was aglow with expectation.

Major Brent and his wife had arrived, the latter proceeding at once to the suite she had so long occupied. Bertha was now a happy and serene woman. Pearl Dare came running in and the two, as women do at such times, fell into each other's arms, weeping hysterically.

"Isn't it wonderful?" cried Pearl, amid her ecstasies. "I know it, Bertha. I know that he was different. All along I felt a strange, familiar something in our relations, something which was not clear but which drew me to him, even when I doubted him the most!"

"Where is he now?" asked Bertha Brent, almost as excited as Pearl.

Pearl led her by the hand to a window overlooking the garage. There, in the shadows inside the wide-open door, they saw the man of the hour seated on the running board of the big limousine.

"Have you talked with him?"

Pearl shook her head, unable to remove her loving and beaming eyes from the figure.

"He is waiting for you, Pearl."

"I cannot go to him," she breathed, her voice catching. "This is the most profound moment of his life. I must wait until he is ready."

Together they went down the stairs arm in arm, and joined the group in the library. Here they found Lawyer Bainbridge, the colonel and Major Brent engrossed in the communication to T. O. Adams found in Toko's room.

It was a paper of an altogether startling nature. Pearl, by whom every word had been memorized, found herself once more absorbed in its revelations as she sat beside her father, clinging close. Bertha sat on the arm of her husband's chair. Brent, in whose features a new manliness and latent strength of character was now revealed, listened gravely and with evident self-reproach.

The lawyer was reading aloud.

The communication was without date. It was addressed to Adams and signed, simply "Toko." It was in the English language. Its phrasing gave evidence of the cultured mind of the writer.

Monsieur Adams: The Canal Defense plans lie in the bottom of the canal. Their inventor is dead, for I know that you are not that person, even though you have assumed his name. His body occupies the grave supposed to be yours. From the very beginning I have known who you are, but I have not unmasked you because to have done so would have deprived me of many a timely alibi. And who was there to cast suspicion upon other than yourself?

I congratulate you, Monsieur Adams. But I do not crave your pardon, nor the pardon of anyone concerned in my work.

Captain Payne was innocent: this you know and I know. The secret he carried under his left shoulder strap and in his watch fob locket I suspected the moment he appeared on duty war office sidewalk and accosted Miss Dare and myself on the drive.

I knew from the inventor of the existence of the Canal Defense plans and the chemical wafers. I knew that some trusted army officer would be delegated to



"Pearl, My Love!"

convey them to the commandant at the canal. I knew that a secret meeting of the general army staff had been called that day. I did not know, nor did Miss Dare, that Captain Payne had been called to that meeting, nor did either of us know that they were in Washington. Therefore, when I saw the captain come from the war office my suspicions were immediately aroused. They were deepened when my eye noted, while he stood by the automobile chatting with Miss Dare, that the left shoulder strap did not correspond with the right shoulder strap. It stood higher on the shoulder and seemed to bulge a trifle. Closer observation proved that it had recently been removed and replaced by someone not a tailor.

Then I saw the locket dangling on his watch chain. It was brand new. Knowing that Captain Payne would wear no locket that had not been presented to him by Miss Dare and seeing her eyes suspiciously cast upon it, I inferred that he was the hiding place of the wafers.

But I did not know these things to be facts when I hastened to the Hotel Wilton and through a valet in my employ gained entrance to the captain's room, opened his luggage, took out his private stationery and, imitating his handwriting, left the note of warning as a bait.

The bait took, Monsieur Adams. I, myself, hidden in an adjoining room, heard Captain Payne telephone to the war secretary that someone had leaked, proving to me that my calculations and intuitions were correct.

The rest was very simple. I had handled the captain's clothes too often not to be aware of the size of his coat. To procure a duplicate was an easy matter—and also a duplicate locket. The valet sewed the newspaper under the left shoulder strap in the substitute coat and cleverly left this coat on the tree, taking Captain Payne's in exchange, under his very eyes, when he returned the captain's evening clothes from the pressing room.

The substitute locket was in the substitute coat when the valet hung it on the clothes tree. Payne had thrown his watch and chain in the bureau, having detached and concealed the locket containing the wafers in a side pocket of his coat in accordance with directions which I had heard discussed privately between Colonel Dare and Major Brent.

It will be recalled that on leaving his room in the Wilton, Payne examined the coat on the tree, finding the paper concealed under the left shoulder strap so that secret service men stationed across the street might see this action. He also took the locket out of the pocket and held it in the light. This, too, they saw.

Had Captain Payne opened and examined the locket the success of my ruse might not have been so simply accomplished. For it was, of course, empty. He did not do this, however.

Thus were the Canal Defense plans and the wafers necessary to interpret them stolen, Monsieur Adams.

Now, as to Miss Bertha Bonn. I had never heard of her before that night, but a message from her to Major Brent received during the dinner at the Dares, slipped out of the major's pocket during the ride to the Grandian embassy ball and fell unwittingly into my hands. I saw Miss Bonn at the ball several minutes before I murdered the Grandian ambassador when he was about to weaken in our plot and expose it. I observed that she wore a locket similar to the one containing the chemical wafers. On one occasion she opened it and I caught sight of Major Brent's miniature and the inscription thereupon proclaiming her to be his wife. This gave me an inspiration.

Desiring to draw another high army officer in my power and needing an emissary to convey the defense plans and the chemical wafers to the Grandian border to Bolero, the revolutionist in our employ, I effected the transfer of the wafers in Miss Bonn's hotel apartment and left the packet containing the plans in her suitcase with the assistance of the valet, while she was absent from the room in quest of a newspaper containing the first accounts of the ambassador's supposed suicide.

The Grandian ambassador died from the effects of a powder which I dissolved in a glass of water. I wrote the note found under his dead hand addressed to Captain Payne.

I impersonated myself on the night the army mobilization data was stolen from the secretary of war. I think you knew that.

And now, Monsieur Adams, I take leave of you, never to return. For having failed, my life is worthless to the cause to which it has been dedicated. Why should I live who I am or even intimate a sphere of existence other than the lonely chauffeur occupied?

With you it is different. You can now drop the name of Adams, monsieur, and assume your own, Captain Ralph Payne!

As Lawyer Bainbridge finished, a shadow darkened the doorway. Every-one rose. Pearl advanced with eyes bright and arms outstretched.

Stiffening in the doorway at attention, his heels clicked sharply together, and facing Colonel Dare, the figure spoke.

"I have the honor to report for duty, sir," said the colonel's orderly.

Then he turned hesitatingly to Pearl. Both were pale and trembling.

"Captain Payne!" she murmured, amid the stillness, flying into his arms.

"Pearl," he whispered, gathering her in a tight embrace. "Pearl of the Army and my life forever!"

(THE END.)

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